

Life of the Spirit

A BLACKFRIARS REVIEW



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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| HOPE AND PRAYER | Ambrose McNicholl 557 |
| PRAYER | Bede Jarrett 566 |
| THREE DEGREES | Conrad Pepler 570 |
| HIERONYMUS JAEGER | A Discalced Carmelite 578 |
| SERMON AFTER TRINITY | John Tauler 583 |
| REVELATION AND THE WORLD | Aelred Graham 591 |
| REVIEWS: Reginald Ginns, Conrad Pepler, S. M. Ansgar, | 595 |
| Aelred Graham, John Higgins | |
| EXTRACTS | 603 |

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HOPE AND PRAYER

BY

AMBROSE McNICHOLL, O.P.

 HE National Gallery in London possesses one of the most fervently religious pictures ever painted. The last picture which Botticelli left to the world, the 'Nativity', sums up and expresses the religious sentiments aroused in his soul by the preaching of Savonarola, the visions of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and the spiritual quality of Fra Angelico's frescoes at San Marco. It is the only painting executed by him in the last twenty years of his life, his 'religious' period, and it embodies the fruit of his contemplations as he contrasted the tragic events of that troubled time in Florence with the peace-bearing message of the Incarnation. Under the rough shed projecting from a rocky cave the Mother of God leans in ecstasy over her child, while St Joseph, bent double, sinks his head on his arms, as though overcome in adoration as faith makes known the mystery to his bewildered mind. One can sense the intensity of prayer expressed by those silent figures; but the painter wished to express that which was passing in their souls. The lines of the adoring figures of Mary and Joseph lead the eye to the roof of the shed, where three angels join hands in singing the *Gloria in excelsis*. They are robed in flowing garments of white and red and green; and it seems certain that Botticelli wished thus to represent the virtues of faith, hope and charity, perhaps also the supreme hierarchy of angels, Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones. In the centre is the Seraph, robed in red, symbolic of the flame of love; at either side kneel the Cherub, whose white garment typifies the light of knowledge; and the Throne, garbed in green to express the vitality and freshness of the life of one who possesses God,

in whom God rests as in his throne. Green is traditionally the colour of hope, for we associate that colour with life, with growth, with reaching out to a higher perfection and more full development, with a straining towards that fullness which one does not as yet possess.

As Botticelli suggests, Christian prayer bears the soul on in a movement of adoration—*Gloria in excelsis Deo*—to the exercise of those three theological virtues. For prayer places one in the presence of God, as a suppliant indeed, as a creature, but as an intelligent creature, before a loving friend who is all-good in himself and who is to man the source of knowledge and of help in reaching up to him. Prayer is not a passive state of inaction in the face of God, but an activity, an exercise of the highest faculties: in its perfect form it is a loving communion with God present in the soul as known by faith and relied on by hope. In this sense prayer is the synthesis of life, its highest form. St Teresa and St John of the Cross speak of the degrees of prayer, but they really treat of the degrees of life and perfection, for prayer is the index and as it were the flowering of the soul. As our spiritual life is, so also is our prayer; they reflect one another. The period of daily prayer sums up the daily life of the Christian. What has been, or will be, scattered and dispersed in the many actions of the day is in prayer drawn to a focus and set on God to the extent to which those actions are performed for God; our life is then seen in its true perspective and its essential trend. If the supernatural forces at work in our life are weak, and if our actions have been too centred on self, our prayer will reflect this, and be rather a communion with self than with God.

The Christian life is essentially the life of grace, expressing itself through the activity of the three virtues; if this life is most intense when all the faculties of the soul are centred on God through prayer to the exclusion of all other occupations, these virtues will then be intensely exercised. It is obvious, that prayer is inspired and animated by love, and grounded on faith; it is not obvious, nor is it as often stressed, that the virtue of hope should also be called into play. And yet, since prayer is the reflection of the divine life of the soul, hope must there play the same part as in life; and there, perhaps, its rôle can best be understood.

In the life of the Christian hope makes itself felt and manifest no less clearly than faith and charity. We may daily see its effect in the lives of our friends or of our flock. Some of them seem to be dogged by persistent and terrible misfortune; trials, internal and external, succeed one another almost continuously in their lives, and often they are reduced to a state of poverty and dire want. Humanly speaking, their lives can only be described as miserable. Yet in the midst of such trouble they rise superior to all events, persevering courageously and cheerfully in the pursuit of good works, with a certain serenity and an unshakable confidence in God. The whole-hearted trust of such lives may have moved St Paul to write: 'rejoicing in hope. Patient in tribulation. Instant in prayer.' (Rom. 12, 12.) Such lives manifest a divine power and strength, a supernatural energy that enables man to overcome every obstacle and to support every trial. Such cheerful constancy and purposive energy stand out clearly in contrast to the boredom and listlessness of so many who have more of the goods of this world, and yet seem to have no goal in life, no enthusiasm, no real energy and give way so readily to depression and sadness. The immovable trust of the true Christian can never be confused with the superficial optimism of so many others, and is totally opposed to the cynicism and despair that have seized on a world that has rejected God. Only where there is hope is there true life in its fullness, in the fruitfulness and freshness so aptly signified by the colour green. He who is hopeful acts with zest, energy and enthusiasm. He has set himself an ideal, clearly known as realising his perfection; he strains towards it, knowing that it is lofty and difficult of attainment, yet that it is possible for him to reach it, either by his own power or by the help of another who will not fail him. The help on which the Christian relies, through the virtue of hope, is that of God himself; the strength and power manifested in his life, so devoid of human means, are divine. His goal or ideal is eternal life, and he knows that God in his goodness and mercy wishes to bring him to heaven, and is able to do so. It is this divine help, or rather God himself in so far as his omnipotence is the source of our help, that immediately terminates the movement of the will in hope, thus giving it its character as a theological virtue. By faith one shares in God's knowledge, by charity in

his love, and by hope in his omnipotence.

If prayer be the synthesis and highest form of life, hope will be active in it as in life and will animate it with the same divine power. For prayer also has its trials, its periods of anguish and dereliction, its aridity and its temptations. How often is one tempted to give up, to neglect prayer, to despair of ever raising the mind to God or of ever receiving that for which one asks? It is hope that strengthens the soul manfully to continue, in blind faith, in spite of such difficulties. To the simple desire of gaining God it adds in the face of obstacles a firmness and determination that make one persevere and tend towards him with an even greater tenacity than before. We know that God will help us to pray, and wants us to pray, hope fills us with confidence in that help and nerves us to continue. The virtues of patience, perseverance and fortitude are likewise called into play, especially with regard to natural obstacles, such as distaste, weariness and weakness; but hope sustains us in the face of temptations, above all in the terrible trial of feeling we are already condemned, that heaven is forever beyond our reach. Hope is the divine antidote to that depression and melancholy that from time to time sweep over the soul of even a saint, and may become acute at the time of prayer, when the soul shudders at the sight of its sins in contrast to the holiness and goodness of God. As in life despair dries up all the energies of the soul and undermines its resistance to trials and temptations, depriving activity of all its zest and fullness, so too, when hope is lacking, prayer becomes impossible, and one can only long for the deliverance of death.

Our Lord is, in prayer as in all things else, our model; and in prayer he too was sorely tempted. He had not the virtue of hope, since he was in full possession of that beatitude for which we hope; yet, beside the passion of hope, he possessed all the perfection of the virtue: the complete reliance on the power of God and the certainty of his aid, of his benign will and infinite mercy. In the triple agony of the garden, as he prayed he was assailed in turn by weariness, by fear and by sadness; his comfort and strength were restored in conforming his human will to the loving and omnipotent will of his Father. Instead of the temptations of the fallen angel during his fast in the desert, he is consoled in the garden by the ministering

angel sent from heaven with the assurance of help from on high. And in the agony on the cross, his supreme prayer, he was tried by that most dreadful of all afflictions, the torment of feeling abandoned by God. To pray under such circumstances calls forth the highest exercise of the virtue of hope or of the perfection corresponding to it. In that torment he uttered a verse of a psalm that speaks beautifully of hope and is full of confidence in God, to make known the victory his soul had gained over desolation and dereliction: 'into thy hands I commend my spirit'. (Lk. 23, 46.) It is the psalm that begins, in the Vulgate version, with the words: 'In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded' (Ps. 30), which so wonderfully express the need of hope in those who follow our Lord in prayer from Gethsemani to Cavalry. And it is worthy of note that in the psalms, which form such an important part of the official prayer of the Church, the continuation of the prayer of her Head, sentiments of hope are over and over again repeated under a great variety of forms and images. Especially is this true of those psalms which the Church has selected for recitation at the night office of Compline, as a preparation for sleep, that sleep for which the Christian is an image of the sleep of death. The Church bids us to be strong and manful in hope as we gaze in prayer beyond the grave; the watchword of such prayer might be taken from the last verse of the first psalm of Sunday compline: 'for thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope.' (Ps. 4, 10.)

No one follower of our Lord could adequately represent the infinite depths of his holiness nor fully share in all his mysteries; all those perfections that are united in a miraculous synthesis in him are divided out among his members, in his Body, the Church, so that the variety of functions and graces of all his members thus corporately united might make him more fully known to the world. 'So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another. And having different gifts, according to the grace that is given us. . . . And God indeed hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly doctors, after that miracles, then the graces of healings, helps, governments, kinds of tongues, interpretations of speeches.' (Rom. 12, 5, 6; 1 Cor. 12, 28.) All, however, whatever their particular vocation, are called to

follow Christ in bearing the cross, and some chosen souls seem destined to follow him particularly in the desolation and sadness of Gethsemani and the dereliction of the cross. They are continually tempted through sadness, fear, and weariness, especially at prayer; they are haunted by the fear of damnation and obsessed by a profound sense of unworthiness. Their prayer is one long struggle against depression and despair. They, no less than those whose lives are a continual struggle against adversity, are called on to show forth the power of hope, to imitate our Lord in his agony in the garden, and to make reparation with him for the sins of despair and presumption of so many others. In them the virtue of hope is being steadily purified, as they are drawn thus painfully to cast themselves from the abyss of their own nothingness entirely upon the sustaining and unfailing help of God alone.

It is not surprising that prayer should call forth a continuous exercise of the virtue of hope, since prayer is an act of the virtue of religion, and this virtue has a certain affinity with hope. Religion is based on man's condition as a creature; it inclines him to worship God as his Creator and last end, as the source of his being, on whom he utterly depends, and so to recognise the supreme excellence and majesty of God. Prayer sets man before God in this his primary condition as a creature, and through acts of the mind strives to acknowledge that excellence by praise and adoration, and that dependence by humble petition. By petitioning God in prayer, we thereby praise him, in recognising our need and his power and majesty. 'We pray', says St Thomas, 'not that we may inform God of our needs and desires, but that we ourselves may realise that in need we must have recourse to the divine help.' (II-II, 83, 2 ad 1.) Prayer thus leads on to hope, which attains to God himself as helping us, to that omnipotence which places within our power an object altogether exceeding the power of any mere creature to attain. Hope, on the other hand, fosters religion in relying on those divine attributes of power, goodness and mercy which enter into our concept of the majesty of God, so that St Thomas can say quite simply, 'hope rests on the supreme majesty of God'. (*Q. Disp. de Spe*, a. 4, ad 14.) And again he says that 'hope attains God, the supreme rule of human acts, both as he is the first efficient cause, in so far

as it relies on his help; and as he is the ultimate final cause, in so far as it awaits happiness through the fruition of him'. (II-II, 17, 5.) We distinguish these aspects by saying that God as our supreme beatitude is the object of hope, whereas his divine help is its motive. The affinity with religion is clear, but religion is not a theological virtue, since its object is the divine worship, and it regards God as the source of our being; but 'hope makes us cling to God in so far as he is to us a source of perfect goodness: that is, in so far as we rely through hope on the divine aid to obtain happiness'. (ibid., a. 6.)

From another point of view, hope and prayer are intimately connected, in so far as the virtue of hope includes prayer within the extent of its material object. Just as faith regards primarily the truths which God makes known about himself, yet extends also to those natural truths which he has revealed, and as charity, tending primarily towards God as the supreme good, loves also his creatures in so far as they are related to him, so too hope, having our supernatural beatitude as its principal object, extends also to the secondary objects of our happiness, such as the glory of the risen body, the company of the saints, and to the means by which God's help comes to us on earth to enable us to reach heaven. This secondary or accidental object of hope may briefly be described as the region of prayer, since it includes all that one may pray for or desire to obtain from God. In this sense prayer has been called the interpreter of hope (II-II, 17, 2 ad 2), for we hope to receive from God that for which we pray, just as we may pray for all that we may legitimately desire. Prayer thus reveals to us that for which we may hope, particularly those favours for which the Church asks in her official prayers. To the extent to which such goods are desired in relation to our eternal happiness they form part of the object of hope, for they are then regarded as means by which God grants us his aid. These divine aids, or instruments of hope, include all that may help us towards heaven: the humanity of our Lord, our Blessed Lady, the sacraments, the prayers of the saints, even our own prayers and merits. Hope can thus raise our prayer beyond its natural dignity as an act of religion, to bestow on it something of its own theological dignity, by regarding it as an instrumental means towards the fulfilment of hope, as a practical realisation of God's unfailing

help granted to the soul in prayer itself and in the graces which it both begs and merits.

As hope sustains us in prayer and is exercised in prayer, prayer likewise disposes us to grow in hope. It has its own impetratory value; it obtains favours for us, not through our merits alone, but through God's mercy and goodness. It thus makes known those divine attributes in a vivid and practical way, just as it also makes us realise our need and our nothingness by placing us in the presence of God. The central object of prayer must be God, in himself and in his attributes, in his merciful dealings with his creatures, in the power and goodness which they so strikingly proclaim. With this deepening consciousness of our need and of God's power to supply it, the desire to possess God will also grow, the longing to be united for ever to him whose beauty and majesty slowly unfold themselves to the devout mind. So to centre the mind through prayer on the object and motive of hope is to dispose oneself to receive an increase of hope from God, and this in turn will enable one to pray more perfectly. Prayer does not properly praise God nor obtain its desired effect unless it be trusting, unless it be sustained by a lively hope in the will and the power of God to grant what is desired. When confidence is lacking, prayer, if it be made at all, is listless and mechanical. How often do we not meet people who have ceased to pray because they have lost all confidence and feel that God pays no heed to their prayers? One cannot pray or praise God if in practice one doubts his goodness, his providence, his merciful help. Our Lord stresses the need of hope in prayer in the second petition of that prayer which he has left us as the pattern of all others. In asking that the kingdom of our Father may come we include the petition that it may come to us individually, that we may gain the incorruptible heritage that belongs to us as his sons, thus professing our trust in his power to lead even us sinners to the home of our Father. St James echoes this teaching of the Master when he exhorts us to 'ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind'. (James 1, 6.)

The soul may be tossed to and fro on the waves of temptation and buffeted by the winds of adversity in prayer no less than

in life; in such trials hope serves to rivet the soul to God as an anchor holds the ship safe and firm in its moorings. 'We may have the strongest comfort, who have fled for refuge to hold fast the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm.' (Heb. 6 : 18, 19.) Such sureness and firmness show themselves in that certainty which is shared from faith to hope as a sense of security, as an irresistible tendency towards God, an unshakeable confidence in his all-powerful help and in his will to save all men. The absolute certainty of faith reassures the soul regarding the motive of hope that neither God's help nor his mercy can fail. Man, indeed, in his frailty, may fail; it is always possible that he will not avail himself of the means placed at his disposal by God. The certainty of hope leaves room for such fear, and this necessary imperfection of hope is to some extent compensated for by the gift of fear through which the Holy Ghost moves the soul to act in a divine manner. Such filial fear moves one to flee from sin in so far as sin is an offence against our loving Father and separates us from him; it is the creature's fear of not resting in his proper order before God, of not remaining subject to him. It thus naturally includes a deep sense of reverence towards God, whose majesty and eminence demand the loyalty and recognition of his creatures. Filled with such sentiments of reverential fear, the soul becomes docile and mobile under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who thus gradually eliminates the natural imperfection of a too human manner of exercising the virtues. While this gift increases distrust of self and the dread of losing God through our inherent weakness, it carries the soul on in a divine movement to throw itself, in utter reliance and abandonment, on the infinite mercy and power of God, and thus wonderfully increases the inborn tendency of hope to rely utterly on God. Such mistrust of self and complete reliance on God will be most evident and actual in prayer, when fear and hope blend most perfectly, fear of self and hope in God, in that activity by which we profess our need, our subjection to God, and his divine majesty and eminence.

The spiritual writers of the past loved to liken the rôle of the three theological virtues in the spiritual life of the soul to that of the main parts of a building. Faith provides the founda-

tions, hope the walls, and charity constitutes the roof (cf. *Q.Disp. de Spe*, a. 4, ad. 14.) We may carry on the metaphor by regarding the life within those walls as the life of prayer, springing from grace and bending in its activity the influence of faith, hope and charity. Perhaps Botticelli had this also in mind when he represented the three virtues as angels joined in exultant prayer on the roof of the shed that sheltered Mary and Joseph bowed in loving adoration over the divine Child. The wall of white rock in which the cave is set may well typify the strength and endurance of hope. The shed seems to be ringed around by a line of graceful trees set in a green meadow and pointing their leafy green branches upwards towards the sky. We may see in this a symbol of the upward striving of the soul drawn towards God by hope, and of the abundance and fruitfulness of life that flows from hope. For under that roof was born he who is the life of the soul, whose coming to save us is the clearest evidence that our hope is well-founded. We may well take the place in the picture of the oncoming shepherds and pilgrims who are welcomed and led in by embracing angels—so similar to those of Fra Angelico who welcome the blessed into heaven—to cast themselves at the feet of our Lord, there to join in the prayer of Mary and Joseph. They too were ‘looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’. (Titus 2, 13.)



PRAYER¹

BY

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

IN prayer we have to manufacture our own prayer. ‘Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God’—not *the* mind and heart but *my* mind and heart; it is personal—at least, it should be. It is an art like anything else is—an art to be learnt, not some special gift given to one and not to another. We all have it; some have it and don’t use it. Take any other gift—memory, reasoning, will-power—we all have them to a certain

¹ From notes taken at a conference.

degree. Those who have it least need most training in it. Why doesn't God make us all the same? We don't know; it is God's way to make us different. We all have the gift of prayer in some way, to some degree. The man with only one talent did not use it. Why? Fear! A desperate thing, fear, isn't it? It paralyses. Our responsibility if we have little talent for prayer is in some ways greater. We have to work. We cannot slip through the spiritual life. Other things we pass through and forget.

We ought to be better each year. Are you better? You should be. If you used French every day and spoke it constantly, you would improve your French; so in prayer you should be able to express yourself better. Do we take trouble? Do we look back and see how we have improved in the past year? 'Teach me how to pray'—what a pathetic question on the lips of the apostles! We all need to ask the question, though no one can teach us; they must be our own prayers mustn't they? Often this is where we go astray and make our private prayers prayers such as might spring from the lips of anyone. It is difficult. Odd isn't it, that in our everyday life it is difficult to keep silence? We can talk for hours, talk to the same people—but to God, no. Why? Why should it be difficult to talk to him? Partly because our imaginations are not stimulated by sight; he is not visible. God is so vague; there are no external helps. It is always more difficult to talk to God, but it ought not to be difficult. We talk easily but pray badly because we do not talk in prayer enough; we recite, we speak *at* God, not *to* God. Prayer must be familiar—talk, chatter, the unfolding of our heart; it should not be artificial. No one on earth would ever stand being spoken to as we speak to God. 'O Thou'—publicly, yes, but not privately, it is artificial. *Talk*, don't merely present grand phrases. Our prayers are never enough human, never enough *ourselves*. We are creatures of imagination; drop that stilted fashion!

We are distracted. Why? What about? Something or somebody? I am interested in something else. Interested, are you? Yes. Well, what does that really mean? Are you trying to pray about what interests you most, or are you trying to speak of what you think ought to be spoken of? We should pray about what really interests us—distractions, yes; pray about them.

Our prayers must be natural, not making conversation, afraid of a pause. It is a wonder that we do not speak of the weather to God! Talk of the things that really interest you, the vivid things in your life. I never get clearer, you say? Never mind, *talk*. He must be interested if he loves me; we are interested in those we love, interested in anything to do with them. A great number of distractions would never come if we talked of what we ought to do.

Children pray really personal prayers. We should get away from pretence and pray about what we really want. Don't pray for what you don't want. You pray for suffering—and the whole house knows when it comes! Prayer should be familiar talk that runs backwards and forwards between God and us. Be truthful. A novice once prayed to die, and was kept awake by the fear that he might die in the night. Be honest, and if you don't want a thing, say so. He, the most perfect of all, did not want to die—and said so to his Father. God must be bored! He wants to come down to our hearts, but we hold him at arm's length. We must try to be honest with God—to be ourselves. Everything conspires to make us alike, which is a horrible prospect; and we are afraid of being ourselves, of being natural—perhaps rightly so at other times(!), but not in prayer; we need not fear with God. Each one of us then must give our whole heart and mind, and no other heart and mind in the whole world; for no other heart and mind is like mine; it may perhaps be like, but it is not the same, and God asks for this heart—*my* heart—with its fitful fever. He wants *my* heart and *my* mind and *my* language. It may be uncouth, but it is *mine, my own*, that he wants.

I may learn the prayers of saints and *sometimes* I find what expresses my heart, but to use none else is to miss the very point of prayers. Take the prayers of St Catherine, of St Teresa: it would be wonderful if we could use their language; they soar, we creep. It is the language of our own hearts that God wants. 'How shall we pray?' Our Lord answered that question and said, 'Thus'—not 'this'. 'Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father . . .'—that most perfect prayer. We can all use it and mean it, but it is only the model after all. Our prayers must be built with our own hands—the *one* thing I can offer for myself, from myself.

We have to learn prayer. Is there nothing you want? no ambition? no desire? no one in peril? no distress in the world? Isn't your heart torn? Life has many shadows. Well, is there nothing to thank God for? no dear friends, no children, no birds, no song in your life? The things we want, the things he has given us—why, that alone would give us work for eternity! Is there still nothing? Then forget yourself, leave that behind and think of him, his life, his goodness, splendour, generosity, mercy. Why, here there is work for eternity! Isaiah and John caught a glimpse of heaven and heard 'Holy, holy, holy'. Seeing and praising God was ample work for eternity. If we have not anything in our own heart, no petition, no thanksgiving, there is yet the highest of all, praise. There is almost too much; the difficulty is where to start. Oh yes, you do know what to pray about. What is your distraction? That will focus your attention; make that the subject of your prayer.

Prayer is an art to study, not so much the rules, but my own life, the things that hold me, interest me—put these in God's hands. Prayer knits our lives up with God. Little simple things take on a new hue: the world is full of God. That is how we get strength and courage. Prayer is the cry of a heart to God. Sometimes in that heart there is suffering, sometimes petition; sometimes a heart is amazed at the wonder of his greatness. We cannot afford to let the light of prayer flicker out; we must strive to become as effective in prayer as we are in the job God has given us to do. We have studied our work and really are efficient. What lasts beyond this life must be worth while. Seek God and his justice and the other things will follow. I must watch myself with the people I am fond of—how do I talk? That is what God wants; that is how he wants me to talk to him. He does not want books; he never wrote a book. He wants just us; he loves us! That is the only mystery in life; and loving us he loves everything about us, our silly little dreams, our ambitions, just our talk; the things that frighten us. Nothing is little to him. He is in love; and once we are in love nothing is little. Love makes great things little and little things great. Love enlarges, governs, and sets the dull world on fire. Prayer is infinitely great. We must study our prayer and improve and remember that the only person we can learn from is *ourselves*.

THE THREE DEGREES

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



ANY treatises have been composed to reveal the intricacies of the way to heaven in terms of the 'three ways'. The division is hoary with age and inescapable in its simplicity. Wherever there is life there must be a beginning, it must grow and develop, and finally it must reach its fulfilment. The beginners, the progressing or proficients and the perfects make the ground plan for the purgative, illuminative and the unitive ways, and for all the other methods of measuring the supernatural growth of a soul in the life of God. But the majority of the treatises, which analyse the stages of the growing Christian, are devoted to one single aspect of Christian life. They are written in terms of the 'soul' rather than of a whole human being, and they consider rather the individual, isolated spirit of a single man than the nature of man in its context of creation. This is no error or lack of vision on the part of the authors of these works, for they are specialists dealing with a particular aspect of holiness and its attainment. What they say is of the greatest value, and is based on the writings of all the great theologians and saints from St Augustine through St Thomas Aquinas to St John of the Cross.

Yet this division needs to be put into a wider context, for it is realised on three distinct levels of Christian life, and these three levels are unhappily too often divorced from one another when they need to be closely bound together if man is really to grow normally holy instead of so often tending to become an abnormality.

The first level is that of nature itself taken as a whole of which man finds himself a part. In this sphere man is forced to enter into a world-wide rhythm of beginning, growth and fulfilment in union with the animals, the plants and the earth itself. This rhythm is for man, his human birth, his growth to maturity and his completed decline to the grave, a develop-

ment which spans the normal life of man. But he has to fit this development into a quicker pulse—that of the single year of spring, summer, winter, in the orderly succession of which seasons he finds his livelihood, and plays his part in the movement of creation as a whole. We know that these seasons themselves are linked with the regular movements of the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars. In short, the ‘three ways’ in nature are fundamental to the movement of the whole universe and all the invisible natural powers of radiation, gravity, cellular fission and the rest.

In the past man recognised the part this movement played in his life. He recognised how completely dependent he was upon the rain, the wind and the sun, upon the way the day and night behaved according to their regular movements. Whether he was a herdsman or a tiller of the soil he recognised that these powers and their orderly behaviour must be respected, and that if he was to live the orderly life of three score years and ten that he desired, he must live in harmony with spring, summer, winter, with day and night, with sun and moon, with rain and dry air. So he paid his respects to this ‘whole’ in which he lived by performing all the movements essential to his own life in conscious relation to the movements of the whole. His food was germinated in spring, reaped in summer, and fulfilled his being by sustaining it in winter. His religion and his art were centred round the festivals of sowing, harvesting, and gathering into barns—spring festivals, harvest festivals, and turn-of-the-year festivals. His bringing forth of children and all their natural development to puberty and wedlock and finally to paternity again were all effectively linked to this same cycle of the movements of the heavenly spheres. The contamination of blood, disease and death was something out of harmony with the cycle of life; the powers of nature that led to maturity and perfection had to be placated in order that man might once again take his part in the normal cycle. This was done by purifications which converted the evil into a good, so that even the corpse became a relic, and the departed entered into the perfection of the venerated ancestors.

Thus all the natural life of man was plotted by the motion of the spheres. Feeding and reproduction were understood to be bound up with the seasons and the phases of the moon, and

it was from these movements that the social and intellectual life of man was regulated and developed. In other words, the second level of human life sprang from the first; man necessarily lived a liturgical and ritualistic life following the same rhythm as nature around him. At first it was the need for rain to raise the seeds of corn to full life that led to the new year and spring festivals. Everywhere throughout the world the turn of the year, the spring and the harvest were celebrated ritually, because man cannot simply leave nature to take its course as the birds and the cattle do. Man is an intellectual part of the rhythm of the world and he has to take his part intellectually in this movement or he would be failing in his duty and upsetting the harmony of the spheres. It was in fact essential to the proper functioning of the seasons and of the cycle of life and death that man should have his ceremonial festivals.

When we go behind the scenes of these dances of the stars and dances of the dervishes and discover that this ordered movement proceeds from the unmoved Mover, and that the Creator has set this Nature to work compounded of these milliards of natures each working in its appointed way and playing its ordained part in the eternal cycle, we can realise what the movement means. If God has made this 'Nature', then the men who play the human, intellectual part within the whole, who pay their respects to the powers and harmonise the tribe with the hidden sources of life, are worshipping the Creator in a way consonant with the whole universe. These festivals are fundamentally wholesome in their conception despite the terrible abuses to which they were sometimes put by human sacrifice or torture or taboo. And we can find a ready confirmation of this fact by turning to the history of the Christian ritualistic life of the sacraments and the liturgical year. For the Christian liturgical year of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost was built upon the Jewish year of 'Tabernacles', Pasch and Pentecost, which in its turn derived from the nomadic and agricultural festivals of the herds and the soil—New Year, Spring and Summer; birth, growth and fulfilment. To understand the full significance of Christmas and Epiphany we must see them in terms of the turn-of-the-year, or Easter in terms of spring. It is not that these festivals of ours are merely elaborations of primitive pagan rites; but they have

natural roots, for man worships naturally, in harmony with the rhythm of nature which God is making—or he should be so worshipping however supernatural and perfect his worship may be. The revelation of our Lord's unique way of worship did not destroy the natural rhythm; it perfected it.

The same may be said of the sacraments around which the Christian liturgical life is fashioned. St Thomas has shown how the sacramental 'system' is devised on the same plan as the system of a man's natural life, birth into a human society, growth, purification and perfection. This is not a mere metaphor to explain the sacraments. The soul and the body make one man and both are born, both need to be cleansed, both have to be fed and sustained. The significant Eastern ceremony of having the corn ground and the flour baked by a local deaconess for the celebration of the Eucharist shows how closely this greatest of sacraments is linked with the natural rhythm of seeding and harvesting. In this way the supernatural ritualistic level of Christian life is supported by the understructure of the natural life, harmonised as it is with the music of the spheres. The great stream of Christian art, musical, sculptural, pictorial, architectural, flowed out from this combination of natural and supernatural. This wonderful heritage of Christendom which we see all about us in Europe would never have possessed that vigour had not the stones of the Cathedrals been raised up from the rock of the countryside, and had not the Easter pageantry transformed the ancient fertility rites of the spring. The Christian ritual was not simply imposed on a Europe converted from paganism; the peasants remained as dependent as ever upon those 'gods of nature', the sun and the moon, the rain and the drying wind, and the Church showed how the wind was the breath of God, the sun shone from his face, and the Mother of God stood in the crescent moon. The natural and the intellectual and the ritualistic or ceremonial moved forward together from birth to perfection.

But there is a third level of Christian living which is more easily separated from and set at variance with the other two. This is the realm of the 'spiritual life' to which the scheme of the 'three ways' is nearly always limited. Here the soul, as we have seen, tends to become the exclusive object of interest. But in fact the birth, growth and perfection of the spiritual

life are dependent too upon the ritualistic and so upon the naturalistic foundations that we have been considering. And that development itself should not be limited merely to the individual soul, for the *whole* Christian and the whole of his Christian society proceed according to the same three ways. The growth in perfection certainly can proceed independently, or rather it can by its own vigour dominate all the outward circumstances. A man may reach sanctity in the squalor of a slum as well as in the even but energetic existence of the peasant. Yet where there is no contact with the natural rhythm of life the spiritual growth is more difficult and the final achievement is likely to be less complete and balanced. The Church has been provided by her Founder with the means of leading her members to perfection; the initiation of the spiritual life and its purification, which are 'purgative' and belong to the stage of the 'beginner', are granted through Baptism and Penance; the development by way of 'illumination' is provided for the 'proficient' by Confirmation, Matrimony and Holy Orders; and the ultimate union of the 'perfects' in the unitive way comes to them through the Eucharist. These sacraments are administered in the liturgical cycle, as already noticed, and are themselves rooted in the movement of the seasons and the natural progress of a man's life, as a member of society as well as a child of the Creator.

* * *

In the present state of civilisation these three sections of a man's Christian life have been almost entirely dislocated so that they have little connection one with the other. Always in a decadent civilisation the second and the third sections become dissociated from one another so that the truly moral life has little to do with the ritualistic life of priests and sacrifices. This was so in the time of our Lord when the Jews lived one sort of ceremonial life and an entirely different spiritual life. Our Lord was constantly pointing out how the two had fallen apart for the men who washed the outside of the cup only. The same dislocation may be observed in any religion where the more 'mystical' elements develop into a movement more or less in opposition to the official religion of the 'gods'—witness the majority of the Persian mystics or even the more platonic leaders among the Greeks before the time of our Lord.

But however divorced the inner life was from the outer, official, worship of the country, the latter was usually respected precisely because it was itself still securely tied to the natural basis of religion in the seasonal life of the world. Now, however, the great majority of people have lost touch with the sense of the seasons as of any vital importance to their lives. They have become scientifically interested in the way the weather works, but they do not accept and respect their dependence on the hidden powers that produce the weather in its seasons. Men for the most part have contact with the soil only through the pavement or the 'tar-mac' road. The spring is something to be observed through a convenient gap in the hedge as they speed, shielded from wind, rain or cold, on rubber tyres from one city to the next. The summer means little more than sand and sunburn. There is no recognition of a rhythm here, still less a protestation of dependence. Every wholesome society must have its roots in the soil, sustained in life by the day and night, the summer and the winter. Not that everyone must work on the land: the roots are hidden, the trunk and branches and leaves are more noticeable—but the roots must be long and tenacious of Mother Earth, clinging to her breasts to sustain life.

That natural rhythm has been broken and consequently the rhythm of the liturgical year and of the sacraments no longer bears relation to what should be its true source and foundation. Easter and Pentecost do not look at the mysterious power of God at work in spring and summer for the foundation of their symbolism. In the southern hemisphere people are content to celebrate Christmas at midsummer because they have not recognised the inconsistency implied in celebrating the turn of the year at that time. Moreover, the sacraments are administered at any time, and the material used for them is not gathered locally from the vines or olive groves, from the wheat fields or even the local springs of living water. The Mass is the sacrifice of the day, but no one now is concerned as to what time of the day: is it a morning sacrifice or an evening? Has it any connection with the rising sun and the movements towards its zenith of the sun's power? Such a question might today be regarded as foolish if not somewhat indecent. But it does represent a dislocation in the Christian's

life, that such questions seldom occur to his mind. Again, to the man who lived in respectful dependence upon the hidden power of God in nature, such rituals as blood sacrifices and the offering of victims had a very profound relation to his manner of life. The blood of circumcision or of childbirth was not merely a medical fact but something connected with the natural development of his life. For such people the eternal sacrifice of Calvary was of immense significance. It was to them the eternal purification, the purgative way achieved for all men, for every tribe and family. But today it becomes increasingly difficult to explain why the outpouring of this Precious Blood was required by the Father of his beloved Son.

The result of this divorce between the ritual level of a man's Christian life and its natural level shows itself in a great number of ways, particularly in the impossibility of achieving any truly Christian art and culture (without the natural *cultus* of the soil, 'agri-culture', the other cultures disappear). But for practical purposes the most important effect is that the ritual level of man's life has become wholly artificial. It is perhaps for this reason that the average man finds little appeal in the ordinary liturgical functions, and why there has to be so much artificial encouragement for people to enter into the spirit of the liturgy. Moreover, as a general rule the sacraments are seen simply in relation to 'salvation' and not as part of the daily life of a Christian in a Christian society. This also may account for the fact that all the modern difficulties surrounding married life, with its concentration on 'sex', has little connection with the mysterious source of supernatural life flowing out from the sacraments.

Finally, the growth of the individual soul has now become equally artificial, and the perusal of the majority of books on the spiritual life leave one with the sense that it all has very little connection with the life of the ordinary man in the street. The people who consciously set out to wade through the mud-flats of the purgative way in order to reach the green banks of infused contemplation are almost universally regarded as being 'out of the ordinary' and in some way 'not normal'. They seldom link up their individual life of perfection with the liturgical cycle, or treat the worship of the Church as anything more than one source from which they can get a few helps in

the spiritual life. Purgation, illumination and union—these divisions have become almost unreal—and the reason would seem to be that the whole way of perfection as outlined in the 'three ways' has become separated from the other two levels of Christian living. The Cistercian way of life still remains after a thousand years one of the supremely wholesome ways of reaching heaven precisely because it links all three into close association. The Cistercian follows our Lord into the realms of contemplation by devoting his life to the liturgical cycle of the life of Christ in the mystical body, and at the same time this life grows up from a close contact with the seasons and the soil. Members of modern religious orders often confess that there come times of tension when the whole system of life seems to become unnatural and almost unbearable. At such times one of the surest remedies is to go out into the garden and dig or pull up weeds. The purification of the soil will provide a purification of the soul.

The purpose of this article is to make a diagnosis, not to suggest remedies. The finding of some way back to the unification of these three sections of the Christian's birth-to-death cycle presents one of the greatest problems of the day. In more primitive times these three layers were taken without thought as essential to life. It was an exception for a man to ignore the phases of the year; it was equally exceptional for him not to take part in the religious expression given to these phases in the ritual life of his society. But in those times the ritual was as much part of the divine movement of the spheres as the rising of the sun. Now we have to persuade man to adopt a set of symbols and to take part in a series of ceremonies which appear to him entirely concocted by his own predecessors. It is rather like asking a man to take part seriously in some piece of play-acting invented by his grandfather in the Victorian age. And if that is so in the case of the liturgy, a man is even more artificial when he takes up the mystics. The reason is surely that both have become divorced from the fundamental cycle of life and the movement of ritual (the liturgical movement) in their proper setting, with their source welling up from the bowels of the earth. The activities of mystics or liturgists at least should be co-ordinated and they should try to abandon the excessive specialisation into which everyone has fallen.

HIERONYMUS JAEGEN

BANKER AND MYSTIC

BY

A DISCALCED CARMELITE



VERY little seems to be known in England as yet concerning this truly remarkable man. He is, indeed, all the more remarkable that his life attracted little attention, and that all his secular activities and circumstances were those of the most ordinary person, while there was no exterior manifestation of the very unusual, supernatural favours of which, for more than fifty years, he was the recipient.

Hieronimus was born at Trèves on 23rd August 1841. His father, Paul Jaegen, was an elementary school teacher. And father, mother and son lived in the school-house—there were no other children. At the age of nineteen Hieronymus finished his schooling and was sent to the Royal Technical College in Berlin, where for nearly three years he studied engineering and kindred subjects. His parents seem to have given him a good grounding in Catholic faith and practice, and at the age of sixteen he joined the Confraternity of the Holy Family, and a zealous Redemptorist became his confessor. In Berlin he was enrolled by Provost Mueller in the young men's sodality, known as the Catholic Students' Union, or Academia, and he also joined the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and the choir of the Catholic church. Provost Mueller seems to have had a strong influence over him, which Hieronymus says was 'good and lasting'. The Redemptorist confessor insisted on spiritual reading, the practice of the virtues, and he required him to give in confession an account of these exercises. To all these good influences Hieronymus lent his full co-operation, and it may be that this was the true secret of his later experiences. He did not look back from the plough.

His studies in Berlin concluded with his appointment to a post in his native town, in the engineering works of Edward Laeis and Co. In 1864 he began his year's voluntary service in the army, and on 1st October, a year later, he entered the Frederick William Foundry near Cologne as engineer for furnace and mining equipment.

The following May he was demobilised, but had to go to Aix-la-Chapelle to report for service to the 1st Battalion of the 28th Regiment. Before leaving he visited the cathedral at Cologne, and in the chapel of our Lady there he received the first of the great graces

with which his life was from time to time illuminated. Speaking in the third person, he describes it thus: 'He wished in some way to take leave of Jesus and Mary. While he was uttering interior prayers, all at once he seemed to hear a voice from heaven, saying to him clearly and impressively: "Go in peace. In every spiritual need, pray to our Lord. In every bodily need, pray to our Lady. Both will aid you."' With his ears he heard nothing. They were therefore imaginative locutions. The young soldier (himself) was, as it were, completely transformed. He went on active service so joyfully that his companion thought him an extraordinarily enthusiastic patriot.¹

While under fire in the battle of Koniggratz, in Bohemia, 3rd July 1866, the idea came to him to beseech the heavenly Father either to grant him the grace never more to offend him by mortal sin, or else to allow one of the bullets whistling around him to put an end to his life. He came out of the action unscathed, and in September of the same year he returned to Trèves and to the engineering works of E. Laeis and Co. He continued to live with his parents, and went back to his first Redemptorist confessor.

At the end of 1867, taking the Berlin Academia as his model, he founded a religious study circle for young men. Later the circle was styled 'Harmonia'. He remained its president for some years, and at the time of his writing of it in 1918 it had been in existence for over fifty years.

About this time, in his room in his parents' house he received a fresh intimation of divine favour. For many months he had been possessed by a deep longing for a more intimate converse with our Lord, and on a certain night he was praying very earnestly to our Lady for her co-operation when, in imagination, his eyes being closed, he saw our Lady standing before him, and shortly afterwards our Lord himself. He rushed into his arms, and our Lord embraced him. Hieronymus did not lose consciousness, but for the rest of the evening he was almost beside himself with joy.

Examining critically this experience, he says: 'Our Lord and our Lady certainly did not descend from heaven in bodily form to visit this soul . . . but they gradually infused into the understanding . . . the ideas which we have just indicated. Our Lady visits the soul to grant its request. Our Lady delivers over the soul to our Lord. The Saviour willingly allows himself to be found by the soul in the way we have described. Thus our Lord, our Lady and the favoured soul together produced in its understanding and imagin-

¹ *The Mystic Life of Graces*. By Hieronymus Jaegen. (Burns Oates.)

ation an effect which caused the soul an extraordinarily great consolation that is unassailable by any doubt.'

Once more, in the war of 1870, Hieronymus was called to the army, and was stationed at Coblenz as Lieutenant, acting at times as Deputy Company Commander. He was cashiered by a Royal Decree for political activities in 1873.

Either during or just before 1876 Hieronymus received the grace of the spiritual betrothal, or, as he calls it, the mystical espousals. The unmistakable stamp of authenticity is upon all that he writes. His deep humility, small concern for self, his hatred of sin, and heroic efforts to acquire and practise every virtue, his sincere longing for God, his veneration for our Lady, and his all-embracing charity towards his fellows betray his saintly soul.

At the time of the espousals our Lord made known to him his desires in an ecstasy of vision. Humility led Hieronymus to resist this choice, and for several days he struggled against the attraction. But our Lord conquered, and hereafter the soul of Hieronymus was frequently visited by the Spouse, until the time appointed, when he became its constant and intimate companion. In his experience the mystic or spiritual marriage was not the occasion of any new or definite manifestation from God, but gradually the soul was 'brought to this state in a way almost unobserved by itself, and not by any special mystical act'. 'The mystical marriage consists in the fact that our Lord dwells continually, in a mystical manner, so closely with the soul that it then does not need first to seek him when it desires to have converse with him.'

At the end of 1879 Mr Laeis's eldest son completed his studies, and the services of Jaegen were no longer necessary to the firm. He was immediately appointed manager of the Savings Bank in Trèves, and continued in this post for nineteen years. Severe headaches caused him to send in his resignation on 31st December 1898. It was not accepted, but he was sent for a holiday to the Tyrol. While there, he received a letter asking him if he would stand as a candidate for election to the Landtag, to represent the district Wittlich-Bernkastel. On 7th March 1899 he was elected, and re-elected five years later, and he remained a member until 1908.

Besides these secular activities, he was an honorary business director of several Catholic institutions: the Providentia Co. Ltd., the St Helen's Homes at Trèves, the Young Men's Hostel at Trèves, and he was diocesan treasurer of the St Boniface Society.

At the age of seventy-six he was urged by his Redemptorist confessor to write some account of his life and spiritual experience, and he wrote two brief autobiographies, one of his external, and the

other of his interior life. These reveal that his book, *The Mystic Life of Graces*, is based on his personal experience. He had, it is evident, wished to remain unknown, and merely out of his rich store of spiritual knowledge, to point the way to other souls, so that they might be sharers with him in the peace and joy to which he had attained.

At this time, when many souls are seeking sanctification outside the cloister, the life and writings of Hieronymus Jaegen should be an inspiration and an encouragement. This saintly man never at any time seems to have had any attraction towards religious life in a community. As a very young man, he merely sought perfection of life, and he profited by every means at his disposal to attain his end. This integrity of soul, this singleness of aim, and humble acceptance of the ordinary means offered him for his sanctification, were, it is clear, more pleasing to God than he realised. His astonishment was therefore very great when he received the grace that came to him in Cologne Cathedral. This experience fortified his faith, and induced in him an increased fear of sin, a deeper love of God, and a consuming thirst for holiness. Thus he advanced rapidly from grace to grace.

He found in the daily round of duty and in the opportunities he had for social service full satisfaction for his burning desires. By mortification, self-sacrifice, and the humble acceptance of the will of God as revealed to him in his circumstances, he mounted superior to earthly things, permitting the Holy Spirit to purge his soul of all dross in the crucible of suffering.

He describes the conditions necessary for the attainment of the mystic marriage with the greatest clearness. 'The favoured soul has to accustom itself to a constant mystical life with God, so that it may fulfil to the best of its power all its active exterior duties, and yet keep its spirit and its heart constantly turned towards God. At one moment it is externally occupied with its duties and its friends, and at the next, internally and mystically with our Lord. That is not difficult for the soul, because spirit and heart are no longer fixed on created things which are not God, and no disordered inclinations disturb its peace. The soul permits everything to approach it peacefully. It treats everything as no longer its own personal affair, but as part of its life with and for God. As far as its spiritual life is concerned, the soul now finds itself in great repose.'

This union of the soul to which Hieronymus attained deepened as the years passed, and not long before his death on 26th January, 1919, he concluded his work with these words: 'We have reached the end. I hope that I have convinced my readers that a reasonable

and well-timed effort to reach Christian perfection is quite within the possibility of all souls, even of many who live in the midst of the world. . . . It is entirely unnecessary that the exterior life of those who are making this effort should differ essentially from the exterior life of all really good Catholics. . . . The duty of man is to co-operate resolutely and constantly. Goodwill, continual perseverance, great self-conquest and a great spirit of sacrifice are very necessary for overcoming any difficulties. But all can at any time be obtained . . . by a zealous use of the means of grace. The Creator willingly supports those who take refuge in Him, especially those who endeavour by prayer, work and suffering to give Him ever greater glory and joy.'

Although audible words were spoken to Hieronymus on more than one occasion, and at other times he had visions, both imaginative and intellectual, like Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa, he insists that sanctity does not consist in these things, but only in a virtuous life and conformity with the will of God. Equally with the great Carmelite mystics he feared to be deceived by the evil one, and he judged the favours that he received only by their effects. If they produced peace and holy joy, and incited to the exercise of a higher virtue, he allowed that they must come from God; but he recognised that not the external manifestation, however seemingly authentic, but the inner grace signified by it, is of value to the soul.

I have not attempted any real analysis of Jaegen's spiritual life, nor made any comparison of his methods with those of other mystics. My purpose in writing at all is to call attention to the striking fact of his having attained to the highest degree of union with God, in a life beset with all the attractions, temptations and absorbing occupations of an ordinary business man. His message surely is that God's grace suffices, and that heaven is within the reach of all.

SERMON FOR THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

BY

JOHN TAULER

Qui Spiritu Dei aguntur hi filii Dei sunt.

For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

—Romans 8, 14.



ALL works that have been accomplished so far, not only by men, but by all creation, all that will be accomplished until the end of the world, however great and beautiful, are nothing compared with the smallest action of God's grace in a perfect soul, nothing compared with what such a one can do under the impulse and movement of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, just as much as Almighty God surpasses all creatures, just so much are his works infinitely above all deeds, methods, theories, inventions that could be imagined by all men put together.

Quite often the Holy Ghost, coming down into a soul, instructs it himself, encourages it, exhorts it, moves and impels it from within; quite often he enlightens it and conducts it exteriorly by the doctors of the Church. He presses it from all sides, as if to say: 'Ah, my friend, if only you would consent to deliver yourself, to abandon yourself into my hands, if you sincerely desired to follow me, I would lead you into the very way of truth and there I could act upon thee and thou also couldst act upon me!' But alas, my dear children, the trouble is that hardly anyone today is willing to follow this wise and good Counsellor and give heed to his warnings. Instead of that, each one follows his personal inspirations, trusts to his own ideas, holds to his own way of life and clings to the blind workings of his senses, his judgment and his own wisdom, all of which hinders the loving action and fruitful operation of the Holy Spirit.

When a man is embroiled in all kinds of vice, how can he hear the voice or the word of the Holy Spirit? how could he understand it? He does not even leave the Holy Ghost room to act. One truth, however, must be borne in mind: that the best way to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit is to keep silence oneself, to have peace around one and to listen. For God to speak, all else must be quiet. For God to act in his divine and special way upon the soul, that soul must make room for him, that soul must be passive. These

two simultaneous workings in one subject are incompatible. Man must be passive where God is active.

Beware, all the same, of interpreting this too literally, as if I mean that strong, virile, inexperienced and above all young people should not bestir themselves to action. On the contrary, it is imperative that they should employ themselves, interiorly and exteriorly, in sensible work, in good deeds, in all the established customs, especially in whatever obedience has laid upon them. I speak chiefly of those who already have some experience of supernatural ways, of those who are seeking the perfection of the favoured children of God. Now, the principles that guide such as these are very different from the rules followed by beginners.

If we look out upon the world now, what do we see? An immense majority of men who are enemies of God. Of the rest, a few serve God under restraint; they have to be coerced, and the little good they do is accomplished, not from love or devotion, but from fear. . .

On the other hand, the well-beloved children of God of whom St Paul speaks are those who are moved by the Spirit of God. Now, how can this be? St Augustine will explain it to us: 'The Holy Ghost', he says, 'works in man in two ways. Firstly, when God disposes, directs and moves him bit by bit, patiently exhorting him, attracting him, insensibly drawing him towards a well-ordered and virtuous life. God employs this method with all who attend to him and who give him room to act by obeying his counsels. Secondly, God's method with his true children is to draw and attract them to him suddenly, raising them to a higher plane, above all ordinary ways, above their own strength, their own deeds or merits, without any intermediary.' These are the chosen children of God.

But alas! there are many who have not the courage to yield up themselves, to abandon themselves to this divine operation and to lean upon it; they prefer to trust to their own ideas in which they put overmuch confidence. We can only compare them with people who, having to convey precious treasure across an immense ocean, would go out of their way, lose themselves in darkness and storms, and after unheard-of efforts see their goods spoilt with seawater and covered with rust. Supposing in their distress a serious and trustworthy man should come and say to them: 'Turn the vessel, follow me', promising to lead them by a bright and easy route, filled with sunshine, sweet with perfumed air, in perfect calm and tranquillity, where the brightness and the heat of the day would not only draw all dampness out of the treasure but would restore all its former beauty by destroying the rust—I am supposing that someone comes offering to better their conditions in every way.

Obviously these merchants would listen gratefully and follow him without delay, would they not? It is the same with us. We are carrying a most precious vessel through the stormy sea of this world. The vessel that carries us is our our sensuality or the sensitive part of our nature. Now, on this vessel, alas! we go astray, towards exterior things which have attracted us, which we have chosen as our aim and upon which we have built up our work, our methods and all our practices; we are always occupied with our own thoughts, our own ideas, our own will, and so we get deeper and deeper into obscurity, into thick and unwholesome clouds—I mean mental blindness and ignorance of ourselves. The enemy of all good, the devil, sprinkles upon our treasure, to tarnish it, corrosive drops. I call these sprinklings of the devils the vain complacency with which we cling to our good works and our habits, enjoying the ownership of them; I call these drops pride, self-will, self-esteem, rebellion, self-pity, and many other vices which are all indeed infected drops with which the devil, alas! soils and stains our beautiful treasure.

Some, when they see these stains upon themselves, seek at once to remove them by confession; but by going to and fro and only seeking an exterior remedy, they do nothing but plunge themselves into a darker cloud. It would suffice to recollect themselves interiorly, to recognise their weakness and acknowledge it before God, whilst waiting for a more propitious moment for sacramental confession according to the rules established by the Church.

Now, whilst we have got ourselves into this fog the Holy Spirit speaks to us interiorly and says: 'Ah, my dear children, did you but trust yourselves to me, if only you would be willing to follow me, I would lead you back again and guide you into the right way'. And who is there, I ask you, who would refuse to have faith in such a faithful Counsellor? who would refuse to follow him? Oh, God grant that we might be wise enough and inspired enough to follow the Holy Spirit and make an effort to heed his warnings, his counsels, his direction, giving up ourselves and our own ideas! How infinitely better it would be for us, but, alas! miserable as we are, we do nothing of the sort! We cling as ever to our own plans, our own methods, our sensual ways, our exterior attractions, our self-will and our own judgment.

However, my dear children, to make my meaning clearer, know that we should have some good plans of our own. We should cling interiorly to some exercises and devout customs, certainly, but let us do it all without a spirit of ownership, only holding to it as to the will of God, submitting with absolute abandonment to his working. Let us beware of destroying his work by a presumptuous and exag-

gerated esteem of our own deeds, by an attachment to our intellectual opinions or to our own natural intelligence. For all who act thus may be compared with an orchard planted all over with magnificent trees, whose fruits look beautiful to the eye but are worm-eaten and fall before attaining maturity. If in this orchard there were still other trees with perfumed and precious blossoms, it will not be long before they are devoured and destroyed by the maggots that fell from the fruit. Assuredly, as you all know, these fruits, as long as you do not examine them too closely or take hold of them, seem as beautiful as those that are sound. But what are you driving at? you will ask me. At this: that each of you must take care to keep your heart absolutely pure, otherwise it will not be very pleasing to God. However, to resume our comparison of the fruit: either I am much mistaken, or you will hardly find two in the whole orchard that are intact and healthy untouched by worms, and whilst the outside looks so beautiful, inside you will find a blemish.

And so it is, yes, so it is that one meets with many admirable good works and sublime methods of life, wonderful words and deeds, and which, nevertheless, inside at the core are mined and devoured by worms or which at least are liable to become tainted, whether it is a question of active or contemplative life, of rejoicing or contemplation, even in cases of ecstasy or rapture to the third heaven. Remember what was said of St Paul and of the angel of Satan sent to buffet him, lest the greatness of the revelations should nurture pride in him. (2 Cor. 12.) If you already had the gift of prophecy, if you worked miracles and prodigies, if you healed the sick, had the discernment of spirits, did you know all mysteries, all your manners and ways of life could easily become corrupted and worm-eaten if each one of you did not observe great vigilance and stand upon your guard.

For instance, let us speak of a well-known daily practice. Many give alms or do some exterior good deeds or showy works of charity; they distribute largesse. If it all passed unnoticed and was known to God alone, they could hardly endure it; they would not be happy. . . . Such indeed is the corrupt state of many that they wish to be seen and known in all that they do and to get something out of it for themselves. All actions done with these sentiments are worm-eaten, were they sufficiently numerous to fill the whole world.

And this is not merely my own doctrine: it is above all the teaching of the Truth himself who affirms it in many places and who in particular bears witness to it in St Matthew: 'And when you fast be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces,

that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret. And thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee'. (Matt. 6.) These words do not only apply to fasting but to all other practices. A little higher up, indeed, in the same Gospel, our Lord thus expresses himself: 'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them: otherwise, you shall not have reward of your Father who is in heaven. Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee' (that is what you do when you put your signature to your alms), 'as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honoured by men: Amen, I say to you that they have received their reward. And when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth. That thy alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee'.

Well, then, my dear children, receive these words not as coming from me but from the Truth, and see at the same time if you gather any fruit from God for those works that have not been done solely for him. If they have truly availed you nothing it is because they are, as I have told you, rotten at the core.

Now, if you like, I will teach you four things which, if you put them into practice, will prevent your good works from being attacked by worms.

(1) First of all, make very little of your works; let them be carried out interiorly and exteriorly as if there was nothing to be gained by them, desiring no reward but God; do them with this sole intention and this only love. Are they pleasing to God and dear to him? Then rejoice. If not, be assured that you have toiled in vain because, in doing them, you had not in view the glory of God and his love.

(2) The second point consists in having a heart that is infinitely humble and obedient, and that not only towards God but towards all men, for the least of all as well as for the greatest.

We read of St Thomas Aquinas that one day, when he was at the convent at Bologna and walking in the cloisters, as was his habit, all wrapt in contemplation, a certain brother of another convent who did not know him accosted the holy Doctor (he had previously got leave from the Prior to take the first he should meet with him, to do some shopping in the town): 'My good brother', said he, coming up to St Thomas, 'the Prior has ordered you to come with me'. St Thomas immediately bowed and followed him; also, as he could not walk so quickly as his companion and was frequently rebuked for it, he humbly excused himself. It was not

until later that the brother, enlightened by his companions, discovered with whom he had been dealing and he asked St Thomas's pardon.

We should all, after the example of this great man, give way humbly to our brethren. We should also convince ourselves that the judgment of others is always better than our own, and instead of disputing yield humbly to what they tell us.

(3) The third advice I would give you is to be deeply humble, always aware of our nothingness, burying ourselves in that as in the only thing we possess of our own. It follows that each one should hold his own works and deeds, even himself, in so far as these things are ours at all, as of no value and even bad.

A holy friar of our Order, through whom God had worked wonders and real miracles because of his merits, was next to me one day in choir, and he said this to me from the depths of his heart; 'I assure you that I am the greatest and most vile sinner on the face of the earth. Everyone should be convinced of this and sincerely acknowledge it, for if our Lord had granted to the greatest criminal all the gifts that he has given to me, he would have become a great saint.'

Those who truly keep themselves in this deep humility would be incapable of in any way judging others and putting a bad construction upon their actions.

(4) My fourth counsel is that you always seek out lowly work for preference, fearing the secret judgments of God, not however as those who are discouraged but like a friend whose constant thought is to avoid displeasing his friend.

These four recommendations come from St Bernard. I am anxious to repeat them to you, for if you do not observe them, whatever may be the number of your deeds in other ways, were you to do all that the whole world could do, all of it would be tainted with corruption.

And now let us look at the beautiful trees full of good fruit in the garden of the Church; these are all humble men, for such alone can bear sound fruit. Unfortunately there are others who give only blemished fruit. Their colour is attractive, doubtless—why, they sometimes appear better than the whole and healthy fruits as long as they remain hanging on the tree under a calm and serene sky; but let the storm come and the winds blow: immediately they will fall and all can see that inside they were devoured by maggots and they are good for nothing. Nay, more, the worms that filled them will spread to all the good trees of the orchard to invade and infect them. These trees laden with rotten fruit are men filled with self-will, rebellious, self-opinionated, those who follow their own bent,

those who rely upon their labours, their intelligence, their apparent sanctity, indeed upon all their great works. They have no confidence but in themselves and their deeds; they do more of these than the truly upright do; but what they cling to most in their ideas, in their customs, in their way of life, is not so much the precept of the Church as their own opinion; their own judgment has made them choose and accomplish all these things. Whilst all goes calmly these men are at peace; while the sun shines and illumines their conduct all is well, their works have a greater appearance of sanctity and splendour than those of truly holy souls. But come the storms of severe temptations, such as the attacks against faith that crop up in our days—make no mistake about it, as soon as trials come of any kind, immediately they fall miserably. Why? Because their heart is worm-eaten and corrupt so that they are good for nothing. The worms with which they are filled come out from them and spoil the healthy grass; that is, poor, ignorant and simple folk whom they pervert and infect with their unsound doctrine and false liberty. Then, at their last hour, with what terrible misery, what distress, with what anguish will they find themselves encompassed when they discover that in their souls they harbour not God essentially but only something artificial! Even then, if some among them chance to be saved, they can consider themselves lucky. For, indeed, all are walking, even though secretly, on that broad way, following their natural impulses, movements, affections and desires. They are far from climbing the straight path and sinking themselves in true resignation; they have never desired to renounce themselves entirely and turn their backs on nature. Doubtless, at times, they do seem to take a difficult or straight road, but the next minute they are back on the broad way; they return to nature.

But we have said enough of these corrupt men; our digression has been too lengthy; let us return to our subject.

As I began by telling you, those are the cherished children of God who are led by the Spirit of God. They are those whose constant study and application is not only to know the will, inspirations and warnings of the Holy Spirit, but to follow them and carry them out. Now, often to these souls a way of dryness and of infinite length opens itself and they are obliged to take it in peril of their lives. If they do so courageously and with joy, trusting and abandoning themselves to the Holy Ghost, there is no knowing how much fruit they may gather. If only they could enter into themselves to see there the workings of the Holy Spirit, what they would discover would be so marvellous that their senses and their intelligence would be confounded. . . . As I have said elsewhere, with God

nothing is lost, nothing is small; but it must be God's work and not man's. We do not doubt that God is infinitely greater, more perfect than all creatures. Consequently his action also infinitely surpasses all those of creatures. Those who get this far, lose hold, in a way, exteriorly of all other work, for interiorly they always have as much as and more than they can get done. It is here that perfect peace and security are to be found. But who could persuade everyone of this? Even those who exhaust their brains (with subtle reasoning) cannot understand it. Be well convinced of this, my dear children: 'Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up'. (Matt. 15, 13.)

Tell me, with what love will not Almighty God seek the soul who leaves him a clear stage so that he can accomplish there his incomparably and infinitely sweet work, so that he himself can enjoy himself in that soul! This love is so great, so excellent, that it is beyond the understanding of men and angels: it is the very love that he bears his only Son. Yes, this way in which the soul is led by the Spirit of God is unfathomable.

Formerly, when St Denis's disciples expressed astonishment that their colleague Timothy made more progress in virtue than they were making themselves, although their good works were more numerous than his, the saint answered: 'Timothy is a man who allows God to act—who *suffers* God'.

But all this is done with a lively faith and far surpasses all the exterior works that the whole world could accomplish. At this stage or in this method nothing is so necessary for the soul as to plunge itself into the depths of its own nothingness, in such a way as to arrogate nothing to oneself, to lay claim to nothing of this divine work, leaving to God all that is God's, and keeping only what is one's own nothingness and self-contempt. For if he takes to himself anything of this divine operation, he exposes himself to the most dreadful ruin imaginable.

In order, then, to keep in our own place in these works of God, let us betake ourselves to him, for he alone, the almighty and glorious God, can grant us this grace. To him be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

REVELATION AND THE MODERN WORLD¹

BY

ALFRED GRAHAM, O.S.B.

IT is a disconcerting experience to read a book on what is perhaps the most important subject in theology, to be aware that one is making contact at every stage with a powerful mind ranging easily over the whole of the Biblical data, to be grateful for a number of profoundly true observations, and yet to find oneself at the end seemingly very little nearer the heart of the matter. The cause of this failure may be no further to seek than the present reviewer's obtuseness, or at least his habitual inclination to approach these problems in a manner quite different from that of the author; but it is not perhaps only the vanity of self-justification which looks for some other explanation. Dr Thornton is a difficult and obscure writer, but he is never unintelligible; given the necessary sympathy, there is significant meaning to be found in all that he says; there is also much that is rewarding. In his earlier work, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, he made a memorable contribution to our understanding of the New Testament. This book has many of the same qualities. Where, then, for one reader at least, does it fall short of the demands of its subject-matter?

The author is concerned with what he calls 'the form of the Christian Revelation as it appears in its original setting'. This he views under two chief aspects, namely, (i) 'the actual substance of the revelation', and (ii) 'its human context'. He deals in the course of the book with a great number of other topics, but all as related to these two main themes. Later he is able to state his position in such a passage as the following:

Thus we are confronted with three fundamental forms, under each of which a process of growth and development is seen to be included within the revelation of God's unchangeable perfection. The three fundamental forms are these: (i) the development of revealed religion in the story of Israel; (ii) the earthly life of our Lord; (iii) the growth of the Christian life in the Body of Christ. The entire biblical revelation is comprised within the unfolding of these three successive stages. Moreover, all the three parts are strongly interlocked and richly overlapping, with a single pattern of divine wisdom running through the whole.

A further quotation will be in place, both as indicating Dr Thornton's 'conclusions' as so far reached and as illustrating his manner of thought:

¹ *Revelation and the Modern World*. By L. S. Thornton, c.B. (Dacre Press; 30s.)

Thus at every point scientific criticism and traditional theology are mutually dependent. Each represents the truth of the whole, although in altogether different forms. Their very disparity is the condition of their mutual necessity and of their ultimate co-inherence in the proportions of truth. This kind of co-operation, which is indispensable to a sound biblical theology, corresponds to the other forms of co-operation which characterise the realms of nature and of grace. Objects are known in their relations, and in no other way. But these relations are always of two kinds. Each system of knowledge can be seen to be, in this respect, analogous, on the one hand, to some one cultural grouping of human society or again to any one of the 'levels' which 'interlock' or overlap in the graded universe. Each of these units draws its character and its coherence from the uniform system of relations which it contains within itself.

In a sense it is unfair to describe the above as embodying the author's conclusions; for these, in so far as they are ascertainable at all, can only be grasped from the work as a whole. With Dr Thornton everything is in multiple relation to everything else—'*Objects are known in their relations, and in no other way*'—and his exposition proceeds with constant reference to what has been, or is yet to be, said. For him revelation is to be regarded as an 'organism', a 'living biological phenomenon'; we must avoid a 'spurious simplicity' and 'fragmentary forms' and accept the fact that revelation and interpretation are correlated and inseparable. The foregoing quotations, though they leave on one side the incidental riches of the book, do perhaps give some idea of its general drift; they suggest enough to form a basis for criticism. This is now offered, as it needs must be, summarily, but with the tentativeness due to personal impression.

First, it must be said that Dr Thornton, despite his learning, does not deal with the fundamental problems involved in the nature of revelation. His philosophy (which owes much to Leibniz) is unequal to the burden placed upon it; it is intricate rather than subtle, it extends over vast surfaces at many different planes but plumbs no depths; it fails in analysis—and until its elements have been adequately analysed every synthesis is premature. Thus Dr Thornton does not redeem his promise to deal with the 'actual substance' of revelation. Indeed, the category of *substance* is uncongenial to him; everything is classified in terms of *relation* (i.e., a secondary aspect of 'substance'). And this leads one to think that he confuses exegesis with theology, understood as the science of revealed truth. His 'philosophy' appears to be modelled upon the interrelated structure of the Hebrew sentence and is not really

critical; that is to say, it does not take sufficient account both of the nature of extra-mental reality and of the limitations of the human mind. He seems to think it possible, by a process of dialectic, to apprehend the Biblical revelation as an objective whole; whereas our apprehension is conditioned by our capacity to build it up for ourselves piece by piece in terms of ideas whose objective counterparts are individual *facts*, to which their admitted interrelation is subordinate.

Without an ontology and epistemology at least as profound as Aristotle's—as St Thomas clearly saw—we can give no satisfactory account of how God's word is received by man. What happens, for example, in the mind of the prophet when the word of the Lord comes to him? The answer here depends not so much on Scriptural exegesis as upon an epistemological enquiry into the actual mental processes involved. What precisely are they? On this Dr Thornton has little or nothing to say. Again, the implication of much that he does say is that all knowledge is relative; to which the questions suggest themselves: Has Christianity, then, no absolute and unchanging truth? Are there any *facts* of revelation? If not—then what of the Creeds? If yes—then surely we can, analogically it is true (though in St Thomas's, not Dr Thornton's, sense) determine something of their absolute metaphysical value. How, too, is revelation mediated to each individual man today? As Newman pertinently observes: 'the common sense of mankind feels that the very idea of revelation implies a present informant and guide, and that an infallible one; not a mere abstract declaration of truths unknown before to man, or a record of history, or the result of an antiquarian research, but a message and a lesson speaking to this man and that. . . . A revelation is not given, if there is no authority to decide what is given.' It would be interesting to have Dr Thornton's comment upon this.

Space will not permit any further indulgence in the unwelcome task of pointing out the deficiencies in what is manifestly a major undertaking. But one may be permitted to regret what can only be described as a note of theological insularity. The underlying philosophy has neither its principles in the *philosophia perennis* of the 'great Church' of the West, nor its conclusions within the reach of the *sensus communis* of mankind. To say that St Thomas Aquinas (whose work is apparently *terra incognita* to Dr Thornton!) has both these advantages is to say nothing decisive, but it does suggest a grave omission. One remembers how Archbishop Temple claimed to have read the entire *Summa Theologica*! There may be much that is valuable in 'the new psychological approach to scripture', but it should surely proceed upon, and not by-pass, a metaphysic that has

served the Church from as early as the Council of Nicæa. Dr Thornton's debt to Catholic theologians is, for all practical purposes, nil. Even the elements of the standard theological tractate '*De Revelatione*' he is either unaware of, or ignores;—and how much he might have gained from it. It is a pity; for had he been able to ally his great gift of scriptural interpretation with a truly metaphysical theology, he could have given us a book on Christian Revelation of the first importance.

It is an ungrateful task to be obliged to criticise so radically a major work of a distinguished Anglican theologian—especially so for a reviewer who is by mental habit more interested in points of agreement than of difference. But Dr Thornton is too important a writer to be treated casually. One can see how much of the work of a Gore or a Temple can be embraced in the Catholic synthesis, but it is hard to discern what place can be assigned to so idiosyncratic an essay as this. To seek the 'wholeness' of the Christian revelation through a dialectical philosophy superimposed upon the Biblical data, without reference to the living voice of the Church and the metaphysic of common sense, appears to the present reviewer at least (a conclusion arrived at in all charity and with deep regret), as the pursuit of a will-o'-the-wisp. Is there not, too, something delusive about straining after the 'wholeness' of Christianity by means of a precarious intellectual and imaginative effort towards a return to the primitive Church? Surely the sounder method is to contemplate, in the light of faith and the revealed facts, the Church in its past history and present condition, thence to discern the eschatological pointers to its consummated state as indicated in 1 Corinthians 15, 24-28. Does not the Bible itself prompt us rather to this line of enquiry?

REVIEWS

THE LORD WE SERVE. By Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. (Blackfriars; 7s. 6d.)

If our welcome to this little book is rather belated—it was published last year—it is none the less hearty. *The Lord We Serve* forms the fifth and last of the now well-known series of Theophila Correspondence, the various numbers of which have been so well received. This book is a commentary for the most part chiefly on those sections of the third Gospel which are peculiar to St Luke. But for some mysterious reason the author warns Theophila from the start that it is 'in no sense a commentary'. I can only think that the remark is prompted by his diffidence and humility, because if there is any meaning in words his book is a commentary and no bad commentary either. Readers who are familiar with the monumental works of Lagrange (as the author clearly is), or who had the good fortune to follow the lectures of Fr Luke Walker at Hawkesyard thirty years ago (as the author had), will easily recognise the sources of much that Fr Valentine has to say. But he has, too, much of his own to add—acute and penetrating observations on the Gospel and the lessons one may draw from it. Most Scripture scholars know how hard it is to write a commentary which strikes the happy medium between a coldly literal study of the text and a book of spiritual interpretation which uses the text as a pretext for what one wishes to say; but Fr Valentine seems to me to come near that happy medium. No doubt learned scholars of the Bible will find much to criticise in what he says: fanciful and unjustifiable interpretations; an occasional undue forcing of the text to fit the lessons he wishes to draw; an eclecticism which selects from one of his authorities what would be rejected by another; the stringing together of a remarkable collection of quotations ranging from the works of St Thomas to those of Teresa Higginson. But he writes not for the learned student of the Scriptures who is already well provided for, but for the large number of people represented by Theophila for whom the Gospels are almost a closed book. None of the faults criticised will do them much harm. I will make only one exception. In his fine treatment of the Visitation of Our Lady to Elizabeth he estimates Mary's motives in a fashion that contradicts the text of St Luke and is hardly reconcilable with the conclusions he later draws concerning Our Lady (Part IV). To present her as bursting with eagerness to tell someone what she had learned at the Annunciation certainly does not fit into St Luke's picture of Our Lady 'rising up with haste' to visit Elizabeth.

REGINALD GINNS, O.P.

THE GRACES OF INTERIOR PRAYER. By A. Poulain, S.J. (Routledge; 30s.)

About the time that William James was preparing his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, at the turn of the century, Père Poulain was engaged in a similar occupation with a massive work on *Les Graces d'Oraison*. And though the results of their work are very different, these two men were interested largely in the same thing, the phenomena of religious experience. Poulain of course wrote not only as a trained Catholic theologian but also with the wide scope of Catholic mystical writing under review, while James was concerned with more or less contemporary reports of men and women of no particular creed who experienced conversion, union with the cosmos or with the divine and such-like strange awarenesses. Von Hugel says of *Varieties* that the author almost wholly overlooks the traditional, intellectual framework in which the experiences find their lodgment. The same could not be said of Poulain's work, and yet he too is so concerned with phenomena of the spiritual life that one feels that he has instinctively adopted the modern scientific habit of providing an hypothetical rather than a traditional framework into which he can fit the various facts as reported by those who have ascended the scale of perfection. His work is not therefore traditional, partly because of his modern experimental methods and partly because the traditional theology has remained almost exclusively *a priori* in its approach. Thus for example the traditional theology of progress towards union with God took into account only three 'ways' or main stages to the ultimate one of transforming union. Poulain distinguishes two approaches towards God—one is that of ordinary grace which concludes in the prayer of 'simple regard', the other of extraordinary graces which begin with the prayer of quiet and conclude in transforming union. These divisions can hardly be called traditional, but they are perfectly legitimate on the modern scientific method of finding an hypothetical formula into which as many phenomena as possible may be fitted. If his formula does not prove a completely accurate explanation, that is no reason for condemning the method. He had to produce a formula in order to display the facts, and the display of facts is very impressive and useful.

It is only a pity that this re-impression of the English translation should have retained the original introductory matter written in the early 'twenties by Père Bainvel when the war between Père Poulain's successor and Père Garrigou Lagrange was at its height. The long introduction could therefore have been omitted.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE PLEASURES OF POVERTY. An Argument and an Anthology. By Anthony Bertram. (Hollis and Carter; 15s.)

Readers of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* must not expect to find in this delightful book the description of 'religious poverty' from the pens of theologians and mystical writers who have sought the hand of Lady Poverty. It is important that they should realise the wider, more humane field in which poverty is practised and enjoyed by all types of men and considered and described by many writers and poets, many of them perhaps 'good pagans'. Mr Bertram, who has compiled this anthology, contained in a strong and clear argument of his own (thereby making it possible for us to drink of his vintage with the additional pleasure derived from cut-glass), takes occasion to criticise Eric Gill for being narrow-minded in this respect, and Catholics may too often share this restricted view. 'Eric Gill falls into some confusion of language. He speaks of "evil poverty"'. But poverty cannot be evil; wealth may be: full destitution always is; but poverty cannot be. And he further complicates matters by dragging in the idea of holiness. Holy Poverty is quite a different thing.' (p. 6.) There is a whole collection of wholesome earthly pleasures which the poor man can enjoy, and there is above all 'the escape from the burden of wealth'; and these two aspects of poverty occupy the first two of the three parts of the book. Only in the third part—'The Long Reward'—does Mr Bertram enter the exclusively Christian realms where St Francis and Lazarus are the familiar figures. The Christian reader will, however, do well to begin the argument at the beginning and learn to relish the ideal joy of poverty and its contentment. The selection from English writing, mostly poetry, itself brings a contentment and a pleasure that the poor unruffled man can taste of more fully than the rich. So the Christian should not fall into the habit of regarding himself as a martyr and most of the way to sanctity just because he has to remain poor. And the religious who vows himself to detachment from earthly goods, and so to be free of the cares of wealth and the *vanitas vanitatum*, is evidently better off than the man who worries over his possessions or lack of them, so that it is foolish for him to pretend that he has done anything heroic. Christians both rich and poor, both vowed and free, should follow the broad view of this anthology to obtain a true perspective in an age far too preoccupied by the concerns of property to be free to laugh and love as men—

Ah, what is love? It is a pretty thing
As sweet unto a shepherd as a king—

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

LITURGICAL MEDITATIONS for the Entire Year. By the Sisters of St Dominic. (B. Herders Book Co.)

These two volumes will be most useful additions to the library of any Convent of English-speaking Sisters. The title, and somewhat condensed form of the matter, certainly suggest a book for private meditation where one reads a little and thinks a lot, but they would be equally suitable for reading aloud. The familiar stories are told with a freshness that is pleasing and brief, and this without savouring of mere journalism. The spiritual side is emphasised in a manner both sublime and practical, so that points may be gathered on every page, and the points, being spiritual, will be applicable to those engaged in all varieties of active work as well as to enclosed nuns. From a liturgical point of view the usefulness of the volumes is more difficult to assess; except that they follow the Liturgical Calendar and quote from the Liturgy and Scriptures, there seems to be no definitely liturgical emphasis. That the pages on so great a Master as St Augustine should terminate with a quotation from St Gertrude seems a little strange—not for want of appreciation of that very holy woman, but because one would somehow expect words from St Augustine himself, or else from the liturgy for his feast—but perhaps the unexpected does move, and set us thinking. St Remigius is headed with the words, ‘Behold a great priest who in his days pleased God’ (Epistle)—true, it is an epistle, the epistle of the feast of a great priest, but it is also a quotation from Ecclesiasticus, chapter 44, and is perhaps equally well known as the antiphon, *Ecce Sacerdos*, sung so sonorously in many a parish choir as the local Ordinary enters the church. This feeling of vagueness where the liturgy is concerned will perhaps disappear if the book is used, as it rightly would be, day by day, in union with the Liturgy; perhaps it is hardly fair to criticise it as a thing apart. It is surely a book by Sisters for Sisters, and presupposes the liturgical life.

Although Dominican Saints and Blessed occupy all their feasts, the Sundays have the Roman numbering and all the greater feasts their place. The Dominicans do not monopolise the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, and the modern Saints are included, so that Sisters of any Order or Congregation will find many friends among the holy men and women whose spirit is here set out for example and encouragement.

S. M. ANSGAR, O.P.

WHITHER GOEST THOU? By the Most Reverend E. K. Lynch, Ph.D., D.D., O.Carm. (Newman Press; \$4.75.)

These thirty-three conferences deal with subjects such as the Rule, the Vows, the practice of virtue, the Sacraments, devotion to our Lady, and the spiritual exercises, such as meditation, reading, and the Divine Office, of every day. A man who is obliged to cross a desert on his way to a distant town will at intervals, perhaps, find an oasis and a crystal spring, at which to refresh himself. He will drink great draughts of the sparkling water, and wash the sand and sweat from his eyes and his body. Then, with a cleared vision, and a sense of renewed life and hope, he will press on to his goal. Those who have been privileged to hear these conferences preached must, I think, have received a like sense of spiritual refreshment and renewal, and their presentation in book form should afford a similar revival of spiritual life to all who study them. The courageous attack they make on every form of spiritual blindness and every type of mediocrity in the religious life is what perhaps constitutes their greatest usefulness. They are as a bright mirror in which we may examine our features and see if they are likely to be pleasing to God and his blessed Mother. How clean are our consciences? How charitable is our intercourse with our fellows? How earnest are our resolutions? How ardent are our efforts at self-conquest? How stained are we by self-love, by laxity in obedience, by ambition, jealousy, or what not? 'The lax religious is like a bad apple in the midst of a crate of apples; he spreads corruption and decay far beyond himself, and is the willing tool of the devil for the destruction of the whole spiritual organism of his community.' The writer then proceeds to build up the true ideal of the religious house and its occupants. 'In every religious the fire of charity must burn, and it is from our hearts that it must return to a cold and sinful world.'

This book should offer useful suggestions and afford material to many priests who have the duty of giving retreats, as it offers, not to religious only, but to all who are seeking to live earnest Catholic lives, invaluable instructions, warnings and inspirations, which, if carefully studied, will lead them far on their way. 'Live for the day, try to live every minute of it well, and the morrow will take care of itself.' 'Our life is full of little things, but if they are done for love, the omnipotent hand of God weaves them into the crown which rests for ever upon the head of the faithful servant.' With these encouraging thoughts, the writer brings his book to a close.

O. CARM,

THE LIFE OF AILRED OF RIEVAULX. By Walter Daniel. Translated from the Latin with Introduction and Notes by F. M. Powicke, F.B.A. (Thomas Nelson and Sons; 15s.)

A book of this kind demands, from the present reviewer at least, appreciation rather than criticism. Few, even among medieval experts, can be qualified to sit in judgment upon the work of Sir Maurice Powicke, of whose scholarly integrity there is evidence on every page of this interesting study. Walter Daniel was a Cistercian monk of Rievaulx Abbey from about the year 1150; he was there under the rule of Abbot Ailred, who died in January, 1167. Subsequently he wrote the saint's 'Life', or those parts of it which appealed to him most—for, as Sir Maurice makes clear, Walter Daniel was not without his limitations as a biographer. The present translation and critical notes are supplemented by a lengthy and informative introduction and an adequate index; so that the work as a whole is indispensable to anyone wishing for a first-hand account of the life and times of that remarkable personality, Ailred of Rievaulx.

About St Ailred himself Sir Maurice supplies much information in his invaluable introduction. The historian's critical faculty nowhere conceals his admiration and sympathy for his subject. It is worthy of note, for example, that 'Gilbert of Hoiland and Jocelin of Furness give the salient traits of Ailred's character more clearly than Walter Daniel does. The personality of the abbot is somewhat obscured by Walter's fanciful and exuberant style.' The following passage from Jocelin of Furness may be quoted:

'He [Ailred] was a man of fine old English stock. He left school early and was brought up from boyhood in the court of King David with Henry the king's son and Waldef. In course of time he became first a monk, afterwards abbot of Rievaulx. His school learning was slight, but as a result of careful self-discipline in the exercise of his acute natural powers, he was cultured above many who have been thoroughly trained in secular learning. He drilled himself in the study of Holy Scripture, . . . he was wholly inspired by a spirit of wisdom and understanding. Moreover he was a man of the highest integrity, of great practical wisdom, witty, eloquent, a pleasant companion, generous and discreet. And, with all these qualities, he exceeded all his fellow prelates of the Church in his patience and tenderness. He was full of sympathy for the infirmities, both physical and moral, of others.'

Gratitude is due to both editor and publisher for making available an account at once so attractive and critically satisfying.

ÆLRED GRAHAM, O.S.B.

THE OTHER WORLD According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature. By Howard Rollin Patch. (Harvard University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege; 40s.)

Great progress has been made of late in assimilating the significance of folk lore and myths in relation to Christian beliefs and practices. A century ago scarcely any one had considered the possibility of a fundamental link between these natural and supernatural spheres. Then came the modernist scare which made the orthodox run a hundred miles from comparative studies of the 'natural' religions and their counterparts in the Faith. Now that the scare has subsided we can begin to see how the whole world and all its religions bear some traces of that faith because it was all made in the Word who was eventually himself to be made flesh. *The Other World*, then, does not give us a summary of medieval theology concerning the beatific vision or the resurrection of the flesh, but begins with the oriental and classical descriptions of the Isle of the Blessed and takes the reader through the visions and legends which describe the finding of the Earthly Paradise. It is always across the water, and usually approached by some terrifyingly narrow bridge; at the centre lies the castle, the final stronghold to be won. This recording of all the different myths and their medieval versions is a work of scholarship and of interest to the student of medieval literature. But for the one who has considered the true Way to the Kingdom of heaven it possesses an added significance. The medievals for the most part did not treat these themes from a merely secular point of view. They are outward signs of a deeper meaning which Dante above all understood and described. Dr Patch's book is therefore patient of considerable mystical and spiritual interpretation and assists in the linking up of myth with the Myth which is the Mystery of the Kingdom of heaven. CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

JESUS AND HIS PARABLES. By J. Alexander Findlay, M.A., D.D. (The Epworth Press; 10s. 6d.)

This is a Methodist publication. Its author is concerned to show the 'humanism' of our Lord's parables. He views them as deeply sympathetic sketches of how men and women do in fact behave and of God's dealings with them, rather than as morality tales or matter for theology. Like so many Protestants, he readily ignores all the centuries of Christian interpretation that lie between us and Jesus Christ. Yet this neglect is partly counterbalanced by a freshness of approach, an evangelical familiarity with and love of the text itself, a catholic respect for even fallen human nature and a deep reverence for God made man. JOHN HIGGENS, O.S.B.

TRADITION OF FREEDOM. By Georges Bernanos. (Dobson; 8s. 6d.)

As in all his books, Bernanos writes here with intense feeling: deep love of France, concern for justice, love of the Church, but contempt for the mean, the treacherous, and above all for those who exploit the love and patriotism of others. He must write in his own way, and we can be grateful that he shows up so vividly the weaknesses of the time. If he is still somewhat preoccupied with Franco and Fascism, he has towards the end of the book some penetrating comments on the dangers of the present situation. The dehumanisation of man by our technical advances, the paradoxical situation of the horror of atomic warfare being accompanied by an increased respectability of the man who wages it, the unimportance of the distinction between Left and Right when all governments are dictatorships, the inevitable tendency to go from the abuse of democracy in a mass-civilisation to totalitarianism, these are all topics about which we have been warned before, but rarely so forcefully or with poignancy. It is to be hoped that the clergy will forgive his use of an epithet which most of them—for all their complacency—have not deserved, and take up his challenge to do something for modern man before his soul is finally crushed:

The soul. . . . One almost blushes nowadays as one writes the sacred word. The same swindling priests will say that no power on earth can get the better of the soul. I do not pretend that the brain-plugging machine can eviscerate the soul, or clean the soul out of a man as a cook 'draws' a rabbit. I merely say that men can have souls and not be aware of them, not be in the least affected by them. The fact is all too obvious. Man is in contact with his soul only when he lives the inner life, and the Machine Civilisation is, little by little, endowing the inner life with a new, abnormal character. For millions of fools it is merely the common title of the subconscious, and the subconscious must remain under the control of the psychiatrist.

EDWARD QUINN.

OF THE CHRISTIAN ALTAR AND THE BUILDINGS WHICH CONTAIN IT.

By J. Ninian Comper. (S.P.C.K.; 5s.)

The author is a leading Anglican ecclesiastical architect, and this book contains musings and notes gathered from a long and wide experience. Canon Pilkington has offered his criticisms and suggestions, so that the Catholic liturgical point of view is accurately presented. But there are, of course, many sallies that appeal to Anglican controversy rather than to Catholic instruction. Yet the book will provide a great deal of challenging material to encourage meditation on the meaning of the structure of the altar and the church.

C.P.

EXTRACTS

CATHOLIC ACTION as a modern version of the apostolic life is being progressively deepened and harmonised with the life of the Church in general. At the same time it brings forth new and vigorous organisations within the Church, such as the way of life labelled 'Secular Institute'. Fr Hans Urs von Balthasar, S.J., has written a book which emphasises this very markedly, a book translated into French as *Laïcat et plein apostolat* (Pensée Catholique, Liège; n.p.) and, we hope, shortly to be published in English, a neat book, short and to the point. He shows that the transference of much responsibility for the apostolate from the clergy to the laity cannot be happily effected without reducing both ways of life, clerical and lay, to the common background or foundation—the '*vie evangelique*'. It is here that Secular Institutes have a special part to play. 'Priest-workmen' and 'religious in the world' are all very well in certain countries and for certain needs. But the confusion of function in such activities does not really assist in the conversion of the multitude. A writer in the January *Orate Fratres* gives a vivid description of conditions in an American city where the priest must visit:

Recently I visited the worst slum in the city. The area is called 'The Rock'. What was formerly a coal bin of a foundry was converted by thin partitions into a long row of blockhouses. Each hovel has one room, one door, one window, and no plumbing. . . . In these 10 × 12 rooms live families with children. . . . The owner of the property expressed surprise at seeing a priest in the area. 'Isn't this a little rough for you here?'

The author insists that Liturgy and Missals are not of the first necessity in such places, and certainly the priest does not go to such slums in his 'neatest thing in cassocks'. But the priest should go as a priest, and *with* the laity there or in the neighbourhood he can begin to bring men to the Lord. In general, he must preach the Gospel as a priest, and the laity must take their part in that preaching, not as crypto-religious or semi-sacerdotes, but as lay men and women. The Secular Institutes is one way of bringing this about, for they are decidedly not religious, nor should they try to pretend to be.

DOCTORS and priests are concerned, in a recent number of *Cahiers Laenec*, to study psychasthemia, particularly in relation to the religious life, because it is a malady to which religious are specially prone. After giving typical symptoms the writers of the first article show how frequently psychasthemia takes the form of scruples—'one does not come across scruples on matters of pride or lack of charity; they are always about some ritual act or some material fault'.

People suffering from it are very easily influenced, and therefore one should be very careful in testing the vocation of anyone who is strongly influenced by his mother. Sometimes such influences are not detected until the person has irrevocably committed himself, and the question is bound to arise of whether he committed himself by a free act.

If he is badly directed the psychasthemic may have his pathological uneasiness treated as a supernatural case, in which case the religious life will only worsen his condition, whereas the demands of life in the world will face him up to fight his weaknesses.

In dealing with novices who have psychasthemic tendencies 'one primary error must be avoided: that of releasing him too readily from the external regulations and requirements of the rule'. The fact is that often the master of novices or the seminary director, faced with a novice who complains of being tired whilst at the same time displaying good will and generosity in his spiritual life, will often be inclined to dispense him from certain material obligations and leave him scope to organise his life as best he can. The results in the case of a psychasthemic are usually disastrous. They have been robbed of the very external support which they need and have been imprudently relieved of those very definite obligations which give them a sense of security. Left to themselves, they are incapable of the necessary effort and gradually slip into an undisciplined condition.

Those who are too easily inclined to say that the emotions do not matter in the religious life may be interested in the statistics produced by Dr Barbier to show that people of an emotive temperament tend to choose vocations in which they can sacrifice themselves—in the medical profession, for instance, and especially in religion. From which he rightly concludes, not to a theory of determinism, but that 'it offers the best example one could imagine of the noble rôle of emotion'.

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